

Introduction

(Or, so you want to be a squadron commander?)

Thank you for taking part in the Civil Air Patrol Unit Commanders Course. You are here because you wish to hold one of the most challenging and rewarding jobs in CAP - that of squadron commander.

Being a squadron commander will no doubt be one of the most memorable experiences of your life. It requires patience, dedication, integrity, and ingenuity. But most of all, it requires both a love for Civil Air Patrol and for the members you will serve.

Remember that your primary task as a commander is to **successfully accomplish** the missions of Civil Air Patrol. When you were a regular member or staff officer you could afford to concentrate on one portion exclusively. Indeed, it was your expertise and dedication to one portion: Emergency Services (ES), Aerospace Education (AE), Cadet Programs (CP), etc., that more than likely got you noticed.

But now, you will be responsible for the execution of all of CAP's primary missions at your squadron, and you must balance those missions equally. Your unit may concentrate on one or two aspects at any one time, but your final efforts should forward CAP's three missions. If the path you set as commander ignores any of the primary missions your unit will fail because you will not have supported CAP as a whole. Your unit will not be able to interact with other units, you won't be able to contribute vital resources.

As an example, most senior squadrons are pilot oriented and have aircraft resources. At first glance it may seem that they can only perform one of the three missions: emergency services. But those same pilots, those vital resources can also improve proficiency, raise their sortie rates and support CAP as a whole by flying cadet orientation flights. This single expansion of the unit's horizons now supports the cadet program through their interaction and supports the AE program through using that interaction to expose the cadets to the forces of flight.

If that squadron doesn't diversify, they will be looking for ways to maintain proficiency and stay busy. They will be limiting their own capabilities by only concentrating on one thing. Their value as a whole will decrease.

If you plan to be a squadron commander, the best thing you can do is prepare for your job. You will be far more successful if you prepare for command. Why? Because very few people have the tools for command at the outset. Like anything else in life, those tools have to be gathered and skills learned, then practiced, to achieve the results which the commander desires.

Command requires a healthy knowledge of leadership and management skills, as well as technical competence as it relates to the missions the unit performs.

Management skills are important because you are responsible for the allocation and maintenance of the resources of your unit: materiel, time, and money. It is a tremendous undertaking. You must figure out how to accomplish your mission with the resources you have available, how to replenish those resources when depleted, do it in an acceptable period of time (usually someone's else concept of time and not yours), and do it at a reasonable cost overall. Squadrons and commanders that are successful learn the skills they need to prioritize their needs, allocate resources, and solve problems.

Leadership skills are important because of the most important resource you have - your people. Note how people weren't mentioned as a "manageable" resource. People aren't managed in the generic sense. People must buy in to an idea in one form or another. They need to be motivated. Things do not. People need to understand what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, the consequences if they don't do it, the outcome if they do comply, and

that those efforts are appreciated. In the most basic sense, the one thing people need that things do not is a relationship. Leadership can foster that relationship.

Command in a volunteer organization can be especially challenging, because there are not many tangible or material benefits for membership or participation; you as commander must supply intangible, motivational benefits to encourage your members to perform. This makes leadership skills even more important.

You must really learn three things: the rules of command, those which govern Civil Air Patrol; and you must also learn how to apply those rules in a fair, efficient manner.

This course will present some of the basic leadership and management skills you will need as commander. You will also have the opportunity to apply those skills and rules through questions, critiques, and case studies.

As you progress through the course, you will quickly find that many of the topics and techniques overlap. When you speak to your wing commander about the direction you should take, you are figuring out **what your role in the mission is, integrating missions, and learning how to deal with the wing**. That's only one example. The topics are presented separately to make it easier to take in. But the skills naturally interlock.

Some of the information may seem elementary. Please remember however that the subject matter is new to many commanders. Also keep in mind that the course is designed as much as a stimulus for discussion as it is to impart information. There are many different ways to do the job. These aren't the only ways - or necessarily the right ways for you. The purpose for this course is to encourage thought and discussion - both here and later as you move out to the squadrons you'll lead.

How to use this book

The Student Guide gives you the meat of the course. Throughout the book there are opportunities for you to complete sections. The answers correspond directly with the text or to the slides you will see. You can also complete these sections on your own.

Please read the attachments, they are just as important as the class segments. The attachments combine checklists for you to follow, inspiration reading from Air Force commanders, potential questions you may ask as you take command, and skill building excerpts which introduce basic management concepts.

You will not complete every section in the course; there are more segments than time allotted in two short days. The course director picked the segments you will see based on the needs of the wing, but this doesn't make the other segments less important. Read the other segments after you leave; use this book as a reference when you return to your unit.

You have made a wise decision in preparing yourself for command. Thank you for coming to the CAP Unit Commanders' Course.